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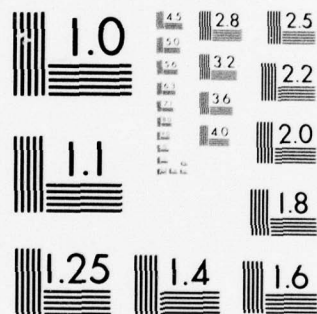
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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

MAJ Timothy L. Felker

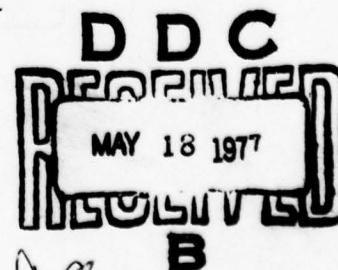
INITIATIVE
A LEADERSHIP TRAIT OF THE SOVIET
OFFICER

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INITIATIVE,
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FOREWORD

This research project represents fulfillment of a student requirement for successful completion of the overseas phase of training of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program (Russian).

Only unclassified sources are used in producing the research paper. The opinions, value judgments and conclusions expressed are those of the author and in no way reflect official policy of the United States Government; Department of Defense; Department of the Army; Department of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff of Intelligence; or the United States Army Institute for Advanced Russian and East European Studies.

Interested readers are invited to send their comments to the Commander of the Institute.


RICHARD P. KELLY
LTC, MI
Commander

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SUMMARY

~~*~~ This paper is a discussion of Soviet concern and pronouncements on the subject of the initiative primarily of commanders serving at platoon through battalion level. Analysis is by content rather than statistics. The research is based mainly on publications of recent years and press articles written in 1974-1975. The analysis reveals that Soviet commentary on the subject is rich, their concepts relatively sophisticated, and the gulf between theory and practice wide, although not necessarily unbridgeable.

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CONTENTS

Foreward	ii
Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Basic Concepts - Soviet and Western	2
Initiative - The Soviet Understanding	7
Responsibility and Freedom	18
Criticism (And Self-Criticism)	21
Conclusions	24
Footnotes	28
Bibliography	24

INTRODUCTION

While initiative has basically always been an operating leadership principle in the U. S. Army, historically, perhaps the most crippling aspect of the Soviet system has been its inherent fear and hence suppression of initiative. This is consistent with what often has been described as the characteristic insecurity of the Soviet system itself.

Although a survey of Soviet military writings since the revolution reveals frequent references to initiative in the Soviet officer, it is evident that there is no detailed, unclassified analysis of the subject available. Yet, perhaps no other single subject is of greater importance in an analysis of what might be expected from the Soviet officer in the field — particularly from the junior officer in the nuclear age. In short, in the dynamic of modern war can he be expected to carry out necessary missions in the absence of specific direction from above? That, of course, is the ultimate question, and a definitive answer to it necessarily lies beyond the scope of this study. But even a cursory search of Soviet publications and press shows that the exercise of initiative by the Soviet officer is far from being taken for granted by the Soviet high command. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to determine what the Soviets mean by initiative, and document, analyze, and evaluate

their concern and pronouncements on the subject.

BASIC CONCEPTS - SOVIET AND WESTERN

Initiative, as a theoretical value at least, has, since the revolution, consistently been preached by Soviet leaders. But the political commissar/political officer and discipline systems have posed fundamental opposition to the concept. By all Soviet accounts, initiative ultimately is based on responsibility and "edinonachalie" (one-man management/unity of command). Thus, the initiative of a commander is jeopardized by a system in which he does not have full responsibility.

The dilemma was present in the Red Army from its inception. Trotsky (People's Commissar for Military Affairs) recognized it immediately, and in December, 1919, spoke out against the division of authority, but at the same time he recognized the commissar's role as political guarantor of the admittedly "untrustworthy" ex-czarist professional commanders, and there the question rested for the duration of the Civil War.¹ By December, 1924, Frunze (at the time, the Chief of Staff of the Red Army), who also understood that dual control "served to deprive commanders of will-power and initiative", was saying that with the latest reduction of the army leaving "the best part of the commanding personnel", it had become possible to foresee practical measures to be taken to concentrate authority in the hands of

commanders.² By 1927 Voroshilov (USSR People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs) was saying that the unity of command principle had been implemented "in significant measure"³, but opposition remained strong and the commander's ostensibly plenary powers were superficial at best.⁴ By the time the problem with ex-czarist officers had been substantially eliminated, it had become the mission of the political organs to supervise, from the political viewpoint, the entire army and its political indoctrination. At certain periods it extended even into the sphere of operational control. In the words of Sokolovskii:

The most essential characteristic of this structure was the indivisible influence and leadership position of the Communist Party in all organs and links of command of the Armed Forces. The most important thing about [literally: "the highest expression of"] the undivided influence and leading role of the Communist Party, was that all of the most important questions of military policy, organization and strategic employment of the Armed Forces were decided only by directives of the Central Committee of the Party. This direct influence and command by the Communist Party throughout the whole complex army organization from top to bottom, was achieved through military commissars and political organs relying on the work of party cells.⁵

For the more current picture, Sokolovskii makes it equally clear:

The most important principles of the work of political organs and party organizations of the Armed Forces are the daily, continued safeguarding of undivided

influence in all aspects of Armed Forces life and activity; insuring the unity of military training and political education, its continuity and clearness of purpose; the combination of collegial leadership and high personal responsibility of leaders to the party in the work entrusted to them; and a close relationship of the party-political organs with the broad masses of communists and non-party members.

The influence of the Communist Party on all aspects of the Armed Forces and their activity is the basic principle of the political organs and party organizations. This principle flows from the very essence of party-political work, from the Leninist position that the military organization of our country cannot be considered separate and apart from the construction of the communist society.⁶

At the same time the Soviets maintain that:

Full responsibility for all aspects of the combat and political life of the troops has been placed on commanders....Commander - one man managers are able to direct the work of the party organization and are relied upon daily successfully to carry out the missions of further increasing troop combat readiness and improving personnel training.⁷

Yet despite such insistence, the lack of identity (not to mention the conflict) between politics and military professionalism will not go away—regardless of how "political" an army is or is supposed to be. The political officer is always there with his separate channel up the chain of command.

Soviet stress on discipline is another major competitor of initiative. Without developing this subject per se, suffice to say that the potential for conflict is

clear in view of incessant reiteration that "an order is law and must be carried out unquestioningly, exactly, and on time."⁸

In a sense, the Soviets have avoided confronting these basic inconsistencies by wrapping them up in the mantle of the Great Patriotic War in which, by definition, Soviet commanders at all levels 'had to have' displayed great initiative and resourcefulness to win the victory over so strong and cunning an enemy as the Hitlerites. And examples from the war are repeated constantly.

Western accounts on the other hand, reject any such contention. In fact, some of the most respected Western authorities label the lack of individual initiative, "the greatest defect of the Red Army officers in the Second World War, and the Finnish war preceding it."⁹ At the base of the charge is the accepted fact that between the world wars the political commissar had in effect been co-commander, and despite abolition of the system in 1940 after the defeats in Finland, its restoration after the disaster of the German invasion, and its subsequent modification, the crippling "dual command" remained.¹⁰

Reportedly, the German view of Soviet military leadership during World War II was that it was best at highest and lowest levels, and weakest at mid levels:

The top level was filled by men who had proved themselves so able that they were allowed to exercise their own judgment,

and could safely insist on doing things their own way. The bottom level was filled by junior officers who, within their limited sphere, tended to develop a good tactical sense, because the incompetent soon became casualties in the field where the enemy's fire was the most immediate danger, and the dominant factor in the problem. But the intermediate commanders, even more than in other armies, were apt to be predominantly concerned with a less concrete but no less hard factor—their superiors' judgment of their performance and fulfillment of orders. That judgment was more to be feared than the enemy in front. The Germans often overheard radio orders threatening commanders with dire punishment if they hesitated to renew assaults that had failed—and the troops in their turn were pushed forward again with the threat of being shot in the back if they faltered.¹¹

Despite acknowledgment in the West that the top Soviet leadership has long recognized this weakness¹², the most widely accepted judgment has rested with:

This system cannot adequately foster initiative despite all the official declarations and regulations. The position would change only if the whole political and social regime of the Soviet Union were changed.¹³

More recent readings suggest that the situation has not changed very much. A November, 1971 article in the Swiss Review of World Affairs states:

The political training to which every Soviet officer must submit, forces him to subordinate his strategic considerations and tactical actions to ideological dogmas which do not accord with reality. Coupled with the innate Russian aversion to responsibility, this results in a crass lack of independence in even the highest Soviet naval officers, who even

in peacetime must repeatedly consult Moscow on the smallest detail.¹⁴

And in 1974 US Army Europe pamphlet, The Soviet Soldier, the point is the same:

The constant stress on discipline and strict compliance with orders and instructions leads to one of the most notable personality traits among all layers of Soviet society—an almost total lack of initiative.¹⁵ The Soviet soldier, if not told what to do, will take no action at all.¹⁶

It is with all of this in mind, then, that the current Soviet stress on initiative should be examined.

INITIATIVE - THE SOVIET UNDERSTANDING

The Soviet military leadership today has a sophisticated understanding of initiative and what's more, appears to have a genuine appreciation for the seriousness of the lack of initiative in the Soviet Armed Forces. Judging by both the tone of the Soviet commentary and by the steady volume of material published over the course of the last several years, it is apparent that the Soviet leadership has resolved to reduce the gap by a prolonged educational campaign led from the top.

For the purposes of this paper the question of strategic initiative (inevitably linked with aggressiveness and skillful defensive as well as vigorous offensive maneuvers) will not be discussed. Nor is the initiative in this context a matter of developing any fundamental theoretical tenets; rather, it is the taking of "a

creative approach to the carrying out of combat tasks, of finding the best course of action for the particular situation, for the particular moment."¹⁷ This initiative is said to presuppose ideological conviction, a sense of the military art, concrete knowledge of tactics and weaponry, strong will, strict responsibility for one's actions and decisiveness.

In general, ranking Soviet officers are quick to criticize those who would say that creativity is only for staff officers and commanders of regiments and higher units, or that lower level commanders have their assigned orders and manuals and simply must learn and be led by them.¹⁸ In fact, most of the information on which this study is based was intended to relate "especially to officers"¹⁹ and more specifically, to commanders from platoon through battalion level. Yet, senior officers frequently are taken to task, also. Not surprisingly, officers working with the support arms point out that the problem of initiative concerns officers and specialists of the rear as well as those in the fighting units.²⁰ Finally, some—the Marshal of Soviet Engineer Troops for example—in singling out the commanders of squads and crews, have written of the need to continue to develop the spirit of independence, initiative, and creative approach to the job on the part of the non-commissioned officer, "the bulwark."²¹ In any event, the apparent major Soviet concern at the moment is the junior

officer. It is toward him that most of the comments by the Soviet military leadership are directed, and thus it is on him that this paper is focused.

Although the need for individual initiative has been preached throughout Soviet history, in recent years there have been signs not only of renewal but of greatly increased seriousness of purpose. In the wake of the 24th Party Congress (1971), there were references to the "new mission" of drawing out "the powerful wave of creative activity of all Soviet people, including our troops."²² A 1973 Frunze prize-winning book also suggests that initiative is a relatively new quality in Soviet military practice.

Flexibility and definiteness in a commander's activities presume the courage to innovate. Innovative search and original solutions were convincingly manifested at troop maneuvers in recent years, which constituted a new stage in the training of troops to conduct modern combat operations. The troops taking part in the maneuvers proceeded in conformity with regulations and field manuals, but their actions were not a simple illustration of points in field manuals. Field manuals are not a rigid scheme which must be precisely followed, but rather a guide to the performance of individual acts of thinking and performance.²³

At the same time, the apparent reduction in the significance of centralization and a greater appreciation for the importance of individual initiative is said by a number of sources to be the result of the characteristics of modern combat—the increased independence of units based on

their enormous fire power and mobility, the increasingly critical factor of time, the need for dispersion and the potential for the uneven development of combat operations.²⁴

The most fundamental Soviet definition of initiative is the use of creative thought to try to apply the most effective means in fulfilling the combat mission. The implication is that:

[On the modern battlefield] the best results can be obtained by centralization of control within strictly requisite limits, by broader decentralization, and by increasing the autonomy and independence of [units of regimental size and below]. However, there must always be assurance of the possibility of establishing a rigidly centralized troop control in the hands of the senior commander at critical moments of battle.²⁵

Beyond this, most authors talk about "reasonable limits", which are firmly bound by the principle that initiative cannot run contrary to the overall plan of the senior commander.²⁶ Some seem further to limit the concept by stressing, "initiative is especially necessary in sudden, radical changes in the situation from when the senior commander had given the order, with changes, or when there is no time for its more precise definition."²⁷ But a corollary to this principle also is expressed, namely, that this does not exclude the need for initiative when the situation is developing according to plan - using initiative to find the best and most effective means of

executing a plan will serve only to facilitate its implementation.²⁸ At times, some go so far as to maintain that independence and initiative "can be permitted only within the framework of the set task...."²⁹ But for the most part this idea is discredited.³⁰ Overall, a premium is placed on independence in decision making. The readership is constantly being reminded that in modern combat, regiments and smaller units are highly maneuverable, and their actions can be decisive especially on the nuclear battlefield where the enemy's defense might be neutralized in depth and tank and motorized rifle troops have the opportunity to develop the advance rapidly. By the same token, with a need to operate out of contact with main friendly forces, success will depend upon the initiative of the commander. Former Defense Minister Grechko himself is repeatedly quoted saying, "Without initiative it is impossible to achieve victory."

In determining the seriousness with which ranking Soviet officers now view initiative, equal in importance to the definition of initiative is the perspective gained in seeing what other qualities the Soviets associate with it. The importance then, of a direct connection between the initiative and the amount of authority an officer has is obvious. In this connection, the Deputy Commander of the Central Administration of Cadre in the Soviet Ministry of Defense says:

The authority of the Soviet officer in many respects is determined by his resolute qualities, by his independence, initiative, the ability correctly to evaluate a situation and quickly make the right decision.³¹

Also, correlation is made with the capability of a commander to maintain self-control and, therefore, command of his unit in the demanding circumstances of combat. Frunze is widely quoted in this context:

We must have at the head of our units people who possess sufficient independence, firmness, initiative, and responsibility. We need such commanders who will not lose their heads in any circumstances.³²

And initiative is often said to be related with a commander's courage—that is, his willingness to take a special risk to win.

Another indicator is that not only is the exercise of initiative included in the Soviet Disciplinary Regulations as grounds for commendation, but Soviet military readers frequently are reminded of the use of material incentives to stimulate initiative and creativity. It is evident that in many cases there is a lack of appreciation on the part of junior officers to give the appropriate recognition for outstanding performances by their subordinates.³³ The other side of the problem is that frequently commendations and material incentives are not deserved by those who receive them. The danger of such actions paralyzing initiative and inculcating passivity, as well as their

adverse impact on authority, are mentioned. Accounts like these bring to mind Liddel Hart's finding 20 years ago that the Soviet system is rigidly centralized and punishes all failure³⁴, but encouragement and reward are much less certain. But the problem is being addressed. Recently, for example, an article in Voennyi Vestnik pointed out that a major was awarded the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" for his initiative and creativeness shown in the seizure and holding of a bridgehead on the Belorussian Front in 1944.³⁵

One of the most fundamental of Soviet precepts is that initiative "can be taught, hardened."³⁶ Many Soviet officer spokesmen express the view that:

Initiative does not come by itself. It is the result of the persistent independent studies/training of each officer, and well-organized command preparations conducted without indulgence and oversimplification.³⁷

This brings up the question of problems the Soviets are having in the area of initiative and in what directions they are moving to solve them.

It is clear that ranking Soviet officers, including many on the highest levels in the Ministry of Defense, are concerned about the problem of senior commanders "lacking faith in" or "ignoring the knowledge, experience, and capabilities" of their lower echelon commanders, and therefore preempting their subordinates by "excessively close supervision".³⁸ They also voice dismay at "some"

senior commanders who in "complicated" training situations do not allow any possibility of independence on the part of subordinate commanders, who in fact make the decisions and command in the place of their subordinate leaders. The point is to create the awareness among senior officers to develop the potential of junior officers, "cultivating initiative, boldness, the ability to take on oneself all responsibility for a decision."³⁹

The Soviets recognize that "...excessive supervision of subordinates, as a rule, develops passivity in their actions, and, equally dangerous, undermines their confidence in themselves."⁴⁰ And "petty interference or a dressing down for any mistake made in the process of taking the initiative undermine the possibilities for the development of independence, and give rise to irresponsibility and inertia."⁴¹ The proper course is said to lie not in rejecting decisions that either are in error or do not coincide with the opinion of the instructors; rather, the subordinate commander should be corrected by creating complementary situations which allow him to realize the errors of his own decisions, so he can change them or adopt new ones.⁴² The commander of the Central Group of Forces himself admits:

...one still encounters exercises in which the development of events is known, down to the smallest details, to the person undergoing training, even as to what elevation or what ravine will be a "surprise" at a particular stage in the exercise.⁴³

As pointed out, in order to develop the ability to achieve the rapid and creative fulfillment of different missions in varied situations, unscheduled tactical training tests can be of particular benefit. At the same time "serious damage is caused by overburdened training programs and schedules" which stifle initiative, cut preparation time, lower the quality of training and undermine the commander's authority.⁴⁴

Another ranking Soviet officer⁴⁵ has stated that the roles played by exercise leaders are extremely important in developing the initiative of commanders. He specifically scores exercise leaders who create stereotyped situations either by not giving participating commanders detailed tactical information, or by forcing their own decisions on the unit commanders; and criticizes the "few" exercise leaders who, when they see that a commander has a different idea, will go so far as to create hypothetical situations designed to thwart any innovation on his part.

The Soviet press is filled with references to building initiative through more realistic training by injecting into exercises various kinds of unexpected situations such as sudden fire fights; the changeover of the "enemy" to counter-attack from directions with difficult access, while dummy counter-attacks are set up on the more desirable approaches; mined sectors covered by anti-tank defense means; strong radio interference making control

difficult. One military district commander stated that it is so detrimental actively to stifle initiative, that, if an exercise will not allow for creativity and initiative, it is better not to run it at all.⁴⁶

But perhaps most to the point are the words of a Soviet captain. He says simply that nowadays practically everyone admits the increased importance of the commander's creativity and calls for it are constantly being made from every quarter, but "very frequently" the creativity is limited simply to the appeals.⁴⁷

In Soviet discussions of initiative, one constantly senses an underlying tension between the need for independence and creativity on the one hand, and military orders and the psychology of repression that is produced in the atmosphere of Soviet dictatorship on the other. It is not enough to cite the numerous paraphrases of Sokolovskii's: "Generals and officers of the Soviet Armed Forces are not mechanical executors of the plans and will of their seniors."⁴⁸ The problem can be seen more clearly in the words of Colonel-General Ivanov, Commander of the Southern Group of Forces. His basic definition of "intelligent initiative" is a composite one which appears to meet all of the 'specifications' laid down by others who have written before him:

Intelligent initiative is directed not against the will and order of the senior commander, but rather at finding the

best means for carrying out those orders, and is based upon outstanding knowledge of regulations and instructions, and the enemy's tactics, and also upon the ability to foresee the development of events. It is an alloy of courage and sober computations, of boldness and the ability deeply and scientifically to penetrate [i.e. understand] the essence of phenomena and the regularities of modern combat. It most clearly characterizes that which we call the personal example of a commander.⁴⁹

But then he says that if a plan has been developed in a timely fashion and if it in fact unites and directs the efforts of one or several battalion-sized or smaller units toward fulfillment of the combat task, "Then it need only be carried out in a strict and consistent manner."⁵⁰

Again he says:

It is a well-known army truism that a chief issues his order and his subordinates carry it out—but in reality this is not so simple. Issuing the order is not everything. It is necessary to see that it is carried out unconditionally, exactly, and on time.⁵¹

Colonel-General Ivanov does add a degree of flexibility in pointing out that events do develop in ways other than anticipated by a commander and, thus, he must be flexible enough to modify, change, or even replace his plan if necessary to meet a new situation.⁵² Still the emphasis is on flexibility with regard to one's own plan, not the plan of the next higher commander. In the end, however, in his description of the kind of personal example a commander should set, he concedes, "It will be impossible to exploit a favorable situation, if on every occasion

subordinates stand and wait for explanations and orders from above."⁵³ It seems that essentially the problem is back in the lap of the senior commander and how much latitude he will give to and demand of his subordinate commanders.

RESPONSIBILITY AND FREEDOM

Soviet doctrine stresses that unity of command heightens one's sense of responsibility, that personal responsibility lies at the very essence of unity of command.⁵⁴ Lenin is quoted saying the quality of leadership is in part determined by great responsibility.⁵⁵ In fact, the need for personal responsibility has been echoed throughout Soviet history. While unity of command has always been said to presuppose the use of "collegiality" or "collective creativity"⁵⁶, Lenin frequently is quoted as saying:

Collegiality should not go beyond the absolutely essential minimum....The irresponsibility that is concealed by references to the group is the most dangerous of evils....A specific person is entirely responsible for carrying out a specific task.⁵⁷

Still, the lack of a feeling of responsibility has remained one of the most serious problems in the USSR. It does seem, however, that the Soviets more and more are facing up to the issue—at least to the point of serious discussion.

In a speech before the Central Committee of the 24th

Party Congress, Brezhnev said that whenever a decision is taken, delayed, or not taken at all, "it must be clear who is responsible."⁵⁸ Widely read writers reiterate that responsibility "forces one to develop his capabilities",⁵⁹ and conversely, "The dread of responsibility fetters initiative."⁶⁰ The importance of the proper "atmosphere" is stressed. Realistic training is recognized as crucial in the promotion of responsibility among officers.⁶¹ In fact, the powers technically invested in the Soviet officer are extensive. As many authors point out, the problem is that in so many cases the powers are not used. But more than that, a man's responsibility consists in his being held accountable for himself and his action. And the significance of his position of responsibility is in proportion to his freedom. Yet the freedom of the Soviet officer historically has been extremely limited. So, too, his sense of responsibility.

Today, however, there seems to be a clear, highly pragmatic strain in Soviet military thinking that seeks to free the commander within tactical limits. It is solidly based in the principle: "The objective is to rule the situation." The authority is Suvorov—quoted demanding the creative use of the principles of military art, not making them stereotypes but using them to gain hold of the situation and using it in one's own interest.⁶² In his Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics,

Savkin writes:

The truly scientific creativity of a commander is expressed above all in the fact that he applies the demands of principles and the norms of regulations and manuals, conforming strictly with the situation, noticing in time the contradictions which have arisen between the demands of principles and reality, and finding the best method of solving them. The principles of military art act as regulators of the creativity of a commander, protecting him from arbitrary rule and adventurism, and directing him onto the path of making correct decisions. The principles help creativity, but should not take its place. They should inspire the commander but not suppress his initiative.⁶³

Savkin specifically states that in arriving at a correct decision in the face of conflicts between the principles of military art and the situation on the ground, "it is the situation which finally, in the last instance, decides the question of the application of a particular principle of military art in each concrete case."⁶⁴

Lastly,

The activity of commanders at all levels is not absolutely free and of their will. Their decisions and actions are determined by objective necessity. But this does not mean that a commander is totally not free to choose a particular version of an action. He is free to the extent that he knows well the goals of the operation or battle, the combat situation, and the laws and principles of armed conflict. Engels pointed out that "Freedom of will means...nothing more than the ability to make decisions with a knowledge of one's business...." Consequently, in order for a commander to act freely, he must make his decision in accordance with the situation and the principles of military art, and in accordance with the

concept of action of the senior commander. The commander's actions are not free in the sense that he is forced to make one of several versions of a decision stemming from a concrete situation. The freedom of his will finds expression in his most expedient actions and in his ability to accomplish purposeful activity in accordance with the principles of military art.⁶⁵

If and when the majority of Soviet commanders are actually able to live this measure of freedom, they will have made a significant advance ahead of their peers in the Great Fatherland War.

CRITICISM (AND SELF-CRITICISM)

One other area of consideration in an analysis of the Soviet treatment of initiative is the matter of criticism (and self-criticism). Much of what is known about the problem of initiative comes through this medium. Probably no other aspect of the problem is so provocative.

Twenty years ago, Liddel Hart wrote that the Soviet regime does not promote a critical attitude and the Soviet Russian is not usually self-critical.⁶⁶ Such a statement is perhaps too readily accepted in the West today. While it is basically true, it requires precise understanding.

Today, in the Soviet press, there is a substantial amount of "criticism" with regard to the lack of initiative and any number of other shortcomings in Soviet society. Certainly, this criticism is strictly channeled and controlled. Its flow is almost always down the chain of

command. In fact, it is evident that criticism comes from above, while self-criticism exists primarily at the lowest levels (although Lenin, indeed, may have had the opposite in mind). Nevertheless, its cut—and significance—is deep.

Importantly, the legal and theoretical bases of criticism are solid. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia cites Lenin's statement that "life goes forward by means of contradictions," and stresses that criticism/self-criticism is "one of the root principles of the revolution", and it constructively exposes contradictions, mistakes and shortcomings thereby leading to their elimination.⁶⁷ Further, one of the resolutions of the 24th Party Congress specified, "It is necessary to increase cadre responsibility for the work entrusted to them and to take the necessary measures against those who...do not draw [the proper] conclusions from criticism."⁶⁸ And one constantly runs across discussions stressing that the "Leninist style of work" emphasizes the development of criticism and self-criticism, again "to bring to light, examine, and eliminate errors and shortcomings."⁶⁹

Certainly, the matter should not be allowed to rest there. Basic contradictions remain. Probably the most negative and destructive aspect of Soviet society is the disparity between theoretical goals and actual practice. In fact, the system requires criticism, but it can be extremely dangerous to those in the system. Occasionally

this point comes through the Soviet media. A case in point is a short story published in the Soviet periodical Neva, just over two years ago.⁷⁰ In it, an officer who continued to speak out about shortcomings does not advance (although he apparently is reluctant to act positively to solve immediate problems). Noteworthy is the aspect that on the one hand the self-appointed preserver of the military standard, who is not able to relate to those around him, is destined for self-destruction, but on the other hand officers who submit to the "modus vivendi" will be dragged to its lowest levels. The dilemma is real. Clearly, it tends to stymie initiative. Nonetheless, the Soviets have at least the theoretical understanding that:

Self-criticism is an effective means of self-teaching of responsibility, if it is used wisely....It must not take the form of self-torture or disparagement, and it must not carry a formalistic character.⁷¹

And, it is evident that there is appreciation at all levels of Soviet military hierarchy for the fact that there are bound to be individual failures in the exercise of initiative, but:

This is not important. What is important is that those mistakes or failures not end in the sharp criticism of the officer's actions by his senior, since this might not only cool, but might even permanently kill the subordinate's eagerness to show independence in his actions.⁷²

What's more, the same author (Deputy Commander-in-Chief of

Ground Forces for Combat Training) then cites an example in which a platoon commander's initiative on ordering his unit to attack an 'enemy' company preparing to carry out a counter-attack caused confusion in the 'enemy' ranks and substantially aided his battalion's advance.⁷³ In short, the platoon leader's initiative was within the framework of the overall combat plan and in fact played a decisive role in its favorable outcome, but the battalion commander improperly evaluated the action and reproached the platoon leader unjustly.

In line with this then, the criticism in the Soviet press with regard to the lack of initiative is intended to bring pressure on and action by commanders to eliminate the stated shortcomings. And it claims to be succeeding. According to one article, for example, most of the critical comments made in the newspaper of the Northern Group of Forces have identified real shortcomings and have brought results.⁷⁴ Reportedly, the commander of troops and his chief of the Political Administration require reports on the steps taken as a result of the critical articles.

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly, today, Soviet writing on initiative and creativity is far richer than it was in previous decades. This can be taken as an indication of a greater appreciation of both shortcomings and needs.

The number of substantive articles written by ranking officers in command positions is, without question, significant. That there is a "bandwagon" aspect to them is not denied, but this does not seem to destroy the otherwise credible probability of substantial impact in time. The underlying pragmatic truth of the need for tactical initiative and the realistic training which can build it seems irrefutable; and now that it has been so highly and specifically endorsed in books and articles obviously intended for wide educational use, it would seem, practically speaking, unretractable.

Quotes from Frunze and all the "Fathers" emphasizing the need for initiative are constantly cited in the Soviet press today, but there is no mention whatever of even the possibility of a stifling of initiative because, as Frunze also pointed out, the military system of a state is determined by the general conditions of life in that state and military doctrine is determined by the general political line⁷⁵ [which in the case of the Soviet Union is totalitarian]. So far as Soviet thinking is concerned, any potential conflict of interest is eliminated by Lenin's 'truth' that the party fosters creativity in every way, and that "properly placed party control...in no way undermines unity of command."⁷⁶ Nonetheless, one can feel, in their commentary on initiative, great tension and conflict between creativity on the one hand and the

system on the other.

Yet, there exists within Soviet communism the philosophical basis necessary to backstop significant moves in the direction of greater tactical initiative on the part of military unit commanders. Given the nature of the dictatorship of the party, the need for political organs with clout down to and including the small unit level is inescapable. And political advantages to the system probably outweigh evident military disadvantages involving weakened unity of command. Still, it seems that a better balance (i.e. in the direction of professional training and tactical initiative) can be struck without seriously weakening party control.

Already, the Soviet officer today is much more of a trained professional than was his predecessor at the beginning of World War II. At the same time, as members of a large unpurged elite in a system operating several steps removed from the Stalinist one of the 1930's and 1940's, it seems logical to assume they have greater self-confidence than their predecessors. And with superior training and greater self-confidence, they today may be expected to act with more initiative than was the case during the Second World War.

Still, there is the less than healthy "peacetime syndrome" common to armies that have not fought for a number of years. Also, with the size of the Soviet

military complex and its enormous turnover of personnel, there is a problem with the significant percentage of junior officers not having the professional knowledge and experience, required in the Soviet understanding, to allow for a great deal of initiative on their part. And, as matters stand, with what in many cases amounts to a shocking lack of realism in training, it is clear that many young potential leaders will not get the sound training necessary for them to act with the initiative so desperately needed. Additionally, it is evident that the Soviet military has historically, and on a grand scale, institutionalized the suppression of initiative. While the admitted level (i.e., "some") of "shortcomings" in command initiative would not necessarily pose a serious impediment to successful military operations, the number of high level statements which point to extremely serious problems indicates the question is hardly one that can be lightly dismissed. At the same time, the major problems have been identified and the need for greater initiative understood and discussed with perhaps surprising sophistication and candor at the highest levels. Pressure can be expected to build, and the situation expected to improve in time. The constant, strong but not shrill stress may indicate that the Soviets are aware that the problem is deep and, in the interests of preventing turmoil in the ranks and tremors in the party, can only be whittled down to size.

FOOTNOTES

1. D. Fedotoff White, The Growth of the Red Army (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 85.

2. Ibid., pp. 220, 218.

3. Ibid., p. 219.

4. Ibid., p. 240. Not only were the political assistants authorized to deal directly with the higher placed political organs as well as with the political personnel in the subdivisions of the units, but disputes in matters concerning political work were to come before political and not military organs. As to the confirmation of the decisions by the Revolutionary Military Councils of the Districts, this also did not offer to the commanders any protection, as the councils themselves could hardly be regarded as purely military organs, permeated as they were by the political personnel. Thus, on the eve of the first Five Year Plan, the process of unification of command had received a severe setback...The political apparatus of the Red Army had remained a state within the state....

In fact, Sokolovskii points out that:

The structure of the Revolutionary Military Soviets of the Northern, Southern and Caspian-Caucasian fronts created during the autumn and winter of 1918 was composed of a commander, who was a military specialist, and two military commissars. The Revolutionary Military Soviets of the armies were similar. All orders issued by the commanders of the front had to be countersigned by one of the members of the Revolutionary Military Soviet.

V. D. Sokolovskii, Voennaia Strategia (Military Strategy). (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1968), p. 419.

5. V. D. Sokolovskii, Voennaia Strategia (Military Strategy). (Moscow: Military Publishing House, Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1968), p. 420-421.

6. Ibid., pp. 450-451.

7. Ibid., p. 449.

8. Marshal of the Soviet Union A. Eremenko "Molodym Ofitseram o Voinskoi Distsipline" (To the Young Officers on the Question of Military Discipline), Voprosy Politicheskogo i Voinskogo Vospitaniia (Questions of Political and Military Education), ed., E. M. Denison, Moscow: The Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1961), p. 186.

9. B. H. Liddel Hart, The Soviet Army (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1956), p. 199.

10. Colonel Louis B. Ely, The Red Army Today (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Military Service Publishing Co., 1949), p. 127.

11. Hart, pp. 2-3.

12. Ibid., p. 199.

13. Ibid., p. 322.

14. Jurg Meister, "Risks of the Soviet Naval Buildup", Swiss Review of World Affairs, November, 1971, p. 9.

15. U. S. Army Europe, Pamphlet 30-60-10: The Soviet Soldier. Washington, D.C. : 24 June 1974, p. 28.

16. Ibid., p. 31.

17. Colonel-General I. Gerasimov, Commander of the Northern Group of Forces, "Boevaia Aktivnost' Komandira" (Commander's Combat Aggressiveness), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 10 (October) 1974, p. 25.

18. Lieutenant General P. Shkidchenko, "Umelo Primeniat' Ustavnye Polozheniia" (To Use Regulations Skillfully), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 6 (June), 1975, p. 39.

19. Major General V. Fedoseev, "Initsiativa Kommandira Radiolokatorshchika" (The Initiative of a Commander of a Radio Location Unit), Vestnik Protivovozdushnoi Oborony, No. 1 (January), 1975, p. 52. The quote is from a statement by former Defense Minister Grechko.

20. Major General Iu. Ponomarev, "O Tvorchestve i Initsiative Ofitserov Tyla na Ucheniakh" (On the Creativity and Initiative of Officers of the Rear in Exercises), Tyl i Snabzhenie, No. 3 (March), 1974, p. 25.

21. Marshal of Engineer Forces V. Kharchenko, "Podgotovke Serzhantov—Postoiannoe Vnimanie" (Constant Attention to the Training of Sergeants), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 11 (November), 1974, p. 8.

22. B. Vasil'ev, Major General of Aviation, and Colonel L. Vialykh, "Vospitanie Lichnoi Otvetstvennosti Ofitsera" (The Training of Personal Responsibility of the Officer), Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil, No. 3 (March) 1975, p. 22.

23. Major General A. S. Milovidov and Colonel V. G. Kozlov, The Philosophical Heritage of V. I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War / A Soviet View / (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1972; translated under the auspices of the U. S. Air Force and published by the U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1974), pp.278-279.

24. See Colonel-General N. A. Lomov, et al., [Biblioteka Ofitsera], Nauchno-Tekhnicheskii Progress i Revoliutsiia v Voennom Dele (Scientific-Technical Progress and the Revolution in Military Affairs), (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1973), p. 171, and V. Ye. Savkin, The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics [a Soviet View] (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1972; translated under auspices of the U. S. Air Force and published by the U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1974), p. 252.

25. Savkin, p. 186.

26. Colonel-General Kh. Ambarian, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces for Combat Training, "Initsiativa Komandira" (The Commander's Initiative), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 8 (August), 1974, p. 7.

27. Fedoseev, p. 53.

28. Ambarian, p. 8.

29. Lomov, p. 171.

30. Major General of Tank Troops P. Butenko, "Kommandir i Boi" (The Commander and Battle), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 4 (April), 1974, p. 45. A case in point:

"In order to gain time to divert and to secure the defense at a new terrain line, the 'enemy' blew up a field charge at the approach to a mountain pass. As a result, the battalion was forced to halt the pursuit and to renew it only after a detour to the pass was discovered.

"Time was lost; the 'enemy' again achieved their purpose. There was still a possibility to overcome them, however. The commander was obliged to declare his intentions expeditiously, and to display initiative by taking the mountain pass by force; additionally, a sector having stout obstacles was readied in order to avert the demolition of a strong land mine. A smaller [unit] could carry out this mission by being sent to the mountain pass by way of a circuitous route. However, the commander let the opportunity escape and subsequently stated, that there had

been no order given to do so. It is understandable that, in actual combat, similar behavior could prevent the fulfillment of the mission."

31. Colonel-General A. Zvartsev, Deputy Commander of the Central Administration of Cadre, Ministry of Defense, USSR. "Utverzhdenie Avtoriteta Ofitsera" (The Strengthening of Authority of an Officer), Kommunist Vooruzhennikh Sil, No. 16, (August) 1975, p. 32.

32. Colonel O. Sokolov, "Leninskii Stil' v Deiatel'nosti Voennykh Kadrov" (The Leninist Style in the Activities of Military Cadre), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 6 (June), 1975, p. 26.

33. Colonel A. Terekhin, "Urezannaia Samostoiatel'nost'" (Reduced Independence), Krasnaia Zvezda, October 22, 1975, p. 2.

34. Hart, p. 322.

35. Colonel-General V. Varennikov, Commander of the Carpathian Military District, "Tvorchestvo Komandira Na Pole Boia" (Creativity of the Commander on the Field of Battle) Voennyi Vestnik, No. 10 (October), 1975, p. 18.

36. Captain M. Trushchenkov, "Tsenit' Vremia, Proiavliat' Tvorchestvo" (Valuing Time and Showing Initiative), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 10 (October) 1974, p. 33.

37. Fedoseev, p. 54.

38. Major-General M. Polokhov, "Bol'shie Problemy Melkikh Podrazdelenii" (Large Problems of Small Units), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 9 (September), 1974, p. 41.

39. Zvartsev, p. 33.

40. Lomov, p. 171.

41. Ibid., p. 230.

42. Butenko, p. 44.

43. Colonel-General I. Tenishchev, Commander of the Central Group of Forces, "Primenenie Neozhidannykh Takticheskikh Priemov" (The Use of Unexpected Tactical Methods) Voennyi Vestnik, No. 11 (November), 1974, p. 29.

44. Lieutenant General A. Khmel, Education of the Soviet Soldier. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 148.

45. Gerasimov, p. 23.
46. Varennikov, p. 21.
47. Trushchenkov, p. 31.
48. Sokolovskii, Voennaia Strategiia, p. 438.
49. Colonel-General B. Ivanov, Commander of the Southern Group of Forces, "Esli Reshenie Priniato, Prikaz Otdan" (If a Decision is Taken and an Order Issued), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 3 (March) 1975, p. 37.
50. Ibid., p. 33.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 35.
53. Ibid., p. 37.
54. Sokolov, p. 27.
55. Vasil'ev and Vialykh, p. 17.
56. Sokolovskii, Voennaia Strategiia, p. 440. For an explanation of collective initiative and decision, see V.V. Dryzhinin and D. S. Kontorov [Biblioteka Ofitsera] Ideia, Algorithm, Reshenie (Concept, Algorithm, Decision) Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense, USSR, 1972, p. 151.
- i.e. The group as a whole and each individual is united by direction, the course of thoughts, a single idea born outside of but at the same time within each individual. Under these conditions another's opinion, criticism, even abstract remark may play the role of "triggering mechanism", producing an "avalanche" of new ideas. Mutual understanding of cooperation emerges, which cannot be achieved through the most detailed explanation. While the decision is being implemented, new information is obtained and the situation changes; the real course of events often deviates from the plans. It is not always possible to exercise complete and continuous centralized control in all stages of military actions. For this reason it is necessary to instill the spirit of the decision in subordinates, so they can direct their obedience and initiative toward it.
57. Dryzhinin and Kontorov, p. 146, and Sokolov, p. 27.
58. Vasil'ev and Vialykh, p. 15.
59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p. 20.
61. Ibid., p. 21.
62. Savkin, p. 132.
63. Ibid., p. 130.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., pp.127-128.
66. Hart, p. 10.
67. F. F. Petrenko, "Kritika i Samokritika" (Criticism and Self-Criticism), Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia. (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House, Vol. 13, 1973, p. 452.
68. Lieutenant General M. Ponomarev, Deputy Chief of Rear Services of the Soviet Armed Forces. "Otvettstvennost' i Initsiativa v Rabote Ofitserov Tyla" (Responsibility and Initiative in the Work of Officers in Rear Services), Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil, No. 23 (December), 1975, p. 25.
69. Vasil'ev and Vialykh, p. 17.
70. Boris Nikol'skii, "Raport" (Report), Neva, No. 8 (August), 1973, pp. 7-38.
71. Vasil'ev and Vialykh, p. 22.
72. Ambarian, p. 8.
73. Ibid.
74. Collective Correspondent of Voennyi Vestnik and Znamia Pobedy, "Effektivnost' Polevoi Vyuchki" (The Effectiveness of Field Training), Voennyi Vestnik, No. 10 (October), 1974, p. 37.
75. White, pp. 168-169.
76. V. Drugov, Deputy Chief of Section, Central Committee Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "Pravo Partiinogo Kontroliia v Deistvii" (The Right of Party Control in Action), Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil, No. 11 (June) 1975, p. 51.

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